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# Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs

## The Early Duterte Presidency in the Philippines

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# The Dark Side of Electoralism: Opinion Polls and Voting in the 2016 Philippine Presidential Election

Ronald D. Holmes

**Abstract:** Despite the limits of elections as a mechanism to secure accountability and ensure substantive representation, the 2016 elections drew the highest turnout across elections held since the political transition in 1986, a clear indication of electoralism. The high turnout may be a result of a relatively tightly contested race, with each of the main contenders appealing to constituencies that they symbolically represent. Nonetheless, the 2016 Presidential elections remained personality-oriented, media driven and political clan dominated. The eventual winner, Rodrigo Roa Duterte, garnered the presidency given a combination of factors: the clarity of his campaign message – focused on curbing a single problem (criminality, in general, and the illegal drug trade, in particular) that he elevated as the most serious concern that the next president should address; significant support from a geographic area (Mindanao) and associated ethno-linguistic groups (i.e., Bisaya); and, serious questions of character and competence raised against his opponents (i.e. Binay, Poe and Roxas).

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**Keywords:** Philippines, Philippine politics, elections, public opinion, electoralism

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The polls are at the heart of our political culture, it is a signal for change and an emblem of our collective decisions – and of who we are and what we value. (*Introduction, Philippine Election Almanac 2013*, Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Office, Office of the Philippine President)

## Introduction

The Philippines was the first country in Asia to hold elections, shortly after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and many Filipinos continue to participate enthusiastically in the political process. For a country where suffrage is a right rather than an obligation, data from the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) indicates that a sizeable majority of Filipinos vote, ranging from 64 per cent in 2007 to 90 per cent in 1987. The International IDEA database also shows that the average turnout in Philippine legislative and presidential elections from 1945 to 2010 was slightly higher (at 78.4 per cent and 77.8 per cent, respectively) than the Asian average of 70.8 per cent and 75.6 per cent, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

While voting turnout has remained high, other forms of political participation have waned. Although there is no measure of political party membership, longitudinal survey data from Pulse Asia Research Inc. shows that only about one-tenth of the Filipino population favour a particular political party. This figure reflects that Filipinos do not really regard parties as an instrument of pursuing their interests. Moreover, this also suggests that parties have not performed their job of recruitment, education, and representation to the extent that a larger segment of the population will express continuous and significant preferences for any of these formal institutions of representation.

Beyond parties, the public has also not taken on other modes of participation. Membership in civil society organisations, as well as in a basic sector group such as labour unions, has declined over the last three decades (Holmes 2016). Since the political transition in 1986, there have only been two episodes of significant popular unrest, the first in 1986 and the second in early 2001, both of which forced incumbent presidents out of office.

Thus, voting remains the primary mode of political participation, notwithstanding the fact that this periodic political exercise has been a less than satisfactory instrument in securing political accountability. This

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1 See <[www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=177](http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=177)>.

reality reflects what Anderson (1998: 266–267) referred to as the Janus-face of electoralism, with a positive and negative side. Anderson concluded that:

the logic of electoralism is in the direction of domestication: distancing, punctuating, isolating. If one asks in whose interests this domestication occurs, one comes immediately to the question of representation [...] The point to be underscored is rather that one effect of electoralism is in the direction of confining active and regular participation to specialists – professional politicians – who not only have a strong interest in their institutionalized oligopoly, but who are largely drawn from particular social strata, most often the middle and upper middle classes. (Anderson 1998: 267)

The run up to and the results of the 2016 elections affirm this dark side of electoralism. Reviewing survey data, the dynamics of the campaign and the results of the presidential elections, I argue that these elections remained political clan-dominated, personality-oriented and media driven. I also recognise that the victor in the 2016 presidential election was propelled to victory due in part to prolonged “candidate bashing” of the other main contenders and the failure of the outgoing administration to institutionalise and remain true to their promise of treading a straight path toward good governance.

The remainder of this article is divided into four parts. The first provides a brief profile of the presidential candidates, reviewing their records as elective and appointed public officials. The second part of the article reviews the pre-election surveys and the shifts in the public’s electoral preferences. That also dissects the preferences of Filipino voters across socio-economic and demographic groups, as well as in different geographic areas. I argue that support for specific candidates was most stable among the ethno-linguistic and geographic areas that specific candidates belonged to. The third section of the article discusses the strategies employed and issues confronted by each of the candidates. The final section provides a brief description of the importance of media, the main battlefield in the electoral campaign, where the public’s views of each candidates were shaped.

## The Candidates

The presidential race pitted one pro-administration contender, Manuel “Mar” Araneta Roxas II, against four other candidates who presented themselves as “alternatives” to the presidency of Benigno “Ninoy” S.

Aquino III by emphasizing the “deficiencies” of the outgoing administration. These candidates were the incumbent Vice President Jejomar “Jojo” C. Binay, Senator Grace Poe, Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte and Senator Miriam Palma Defensor-Santiago (who was ill during the campaign and died of lung cancer shortly thereafter). A sixth candidate, who remained in the ballot despite his demise, prior to the election was former party-list representative Roy Villareal Señeres.

The anointed administration candidate, Roxas, was the Liberal Party’s putative choice in the 2010 elections until he gave way to Noynoy Aquino in September 2009. Sliding down to the vice presidential race, Roxas had been ahead of the other contenders in the 2010 race until mid-April 2010, when Binay closed in. Binay subsequently won the vice presidential race with the smallest margin of any vice presidential contest since 1935, with 41.7 per cent of the votes to Roxas’ 39.6 per cent. In 2011, Roxas was appointed to the Aquino cabinet, first as secretary of transportation and communication and later as secretary of interior and local government in 2012. Roxas was declared the Liberal Party presidential candidate in July 2015.

Of the candidates for president, Binay was first to declare his intention to run for the presidency, shortly after being elected as vice president in 2010. A long-time mayor of the main Metro Manila commercial business city of Makati, Binay was appointed as vice president by President Aquino to the cabinet as chair of the housing commission and was also assigned as special envoy for Overseas Filipino Workers concerns. From 2010 until he faced serious corruption allegations in August 2014, Binay enjoyed majority approval and trust from the public, with his popularity rivalling that of President Aquino. Binay’s significant political capital was also proven when his daughter, a political neophyte, finished fifth (out of 12 winning candidates) in the 2013 senatorial elections. In this 2013 midterm election, Binay created his own coalition, the United Nationalist Alliance, which fielded nine candidates for senator, three (Nancy Binay, JV Ejercito and Gregorio Honasan) of whom won. Given his generally favourable opinion polls ratings and his political capital, Binay was the man to beat for the presidential race.

Another popular candidate in mid-2015 was neophyte Senator Grace Poe. Poe was the adopted daughter of the late popular movie star, Fernando Poe Jr., himself a candidate for the presidency in the 2004 elections. She had been a senator for less than two years when her name was floated as a possible presidential contender. Having topped the senatorial elections in 2013, Poe performed creditably in her first few years in the Senate, facilitating the passage of the Senate’s version of the Free-

dom of Information Act and chairing the committee on peace and order. Given her popularity in pre-election polls, Poe was courted by the Liberal Party to run in tandem with Mar Roxas. Instead, she declared her own candidacy for president in September 2015.

Miriam Defensor-Santiago was the fourth candidate. A multi-term senator, Defensor-Santiago served in every branch of government, from her initial work as a judge in a regional trial court, to her appointment as Immigration Commissioner and Agrarian Reform Secretary under the first Aquino administration (Corazon C. Aquino, president from 1986–1992), and her election as a senator, first in 1995 and subsequently in 2004 and 2010. The presidential run in 2016 was her third run for the presidency. In her first campaign, she finished a close second to Fidel Ramos in 1992, garnering close to one-fifth of the popular vote. In 1998, she vied for the presidency again, finishing seventh among 10 candidates, with barely 3 per cent of the popular vote. Aside from losing in two presidential elections, Defensor-Santiago also failed to win in her senatorial re-election bid in 2001, running under the *Pwersa ng Masa* (Force of the Masses) coalition, supported by recently deposed president Joseph E. Estrada and finishing 15<sup>th</sup> out of 38<sup>th</sup> candidates. Despite her electoral debacles, Defensor-Santiago is known to be a firebrand and maverick and had always campaigned on an anti-corruption platform. During the campaign she downplayed reports that she remained seriously ill despite claiming to have recovered from lung cancer (she died in September 2016).<sup>2</sup>

The last candidate for president was Rodrigo Duterte, long-time mayor of the country's largest city, Davao. Duterte was being pushed to run for the presidency in early 2014 by supporters from Mindanao. From that time until he formally announced that he would run as president in December 2015, Duterte repeatedly said that he was not running for the presidency and at one point even remarked: "I'm telling the Filipino people, *humag ako*. It's going to be bloody," he said. "Because I will not sit there as president and just like any other regime, *sabihin ko, iyan lang ang kaya ko [...] pero pag nilagay ninyo ako* [do not fuck with me]."<sup>3</sup>

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2 Given her illness, Defensor-Santiago was generally not seen as a serious contender and did not campaign consistently. Her major role as a candidate appeared to be to serve as the presidential contender on a ticket with Ferdinand "Bongbong" Romualdez Marcos, Jr. as vice presidential candidate. Marcos, the former dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos' only son, nearly won the vice presidency.

3 See <[www.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2016/110679-duterte-contradictions-dictatorship](http://www.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2016/110679-duterte-contradictions-dictatorship)> (10 January 2017).

However, a key informant<sup>4</sup> revealed that the plans for Duterte's presidential run were finalised in early 2014 when Duterte himself agreed to hold a "roadshow" or "listening tours", primarily on his federalism advocacy. While he did fail to submit his certificate of candidacy for the presidential elections by the October 2015 deadline, allegedly due to familial concerns, the ground was laid for him to come in as a substitute when his party, the *Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Laban* (PDP-Laban), fielded a candidate who then stepped aside for Duterte.

## Pre-election Preferences

In the run-up to the 2016 presidential elections, Pulse Asia Research Inc. (Pulse Asia, for brevity), conducted a number of pre-election surveys, some as part of its quarterly *Ulat ng Bayan* (Report of the Public, UB) or monthly *Pulso ng Bayan* (Pulse of the Public, PB) surveys. In addition to its own surveys, Pulse Asia was commissioned by a major broadcast network, ABS-CBN, to conduct weekly pre-election tracking surveys. Figure 1 shows the pre-election preferences of the eventual five contenders in the presidential race.<sup>5</sup>

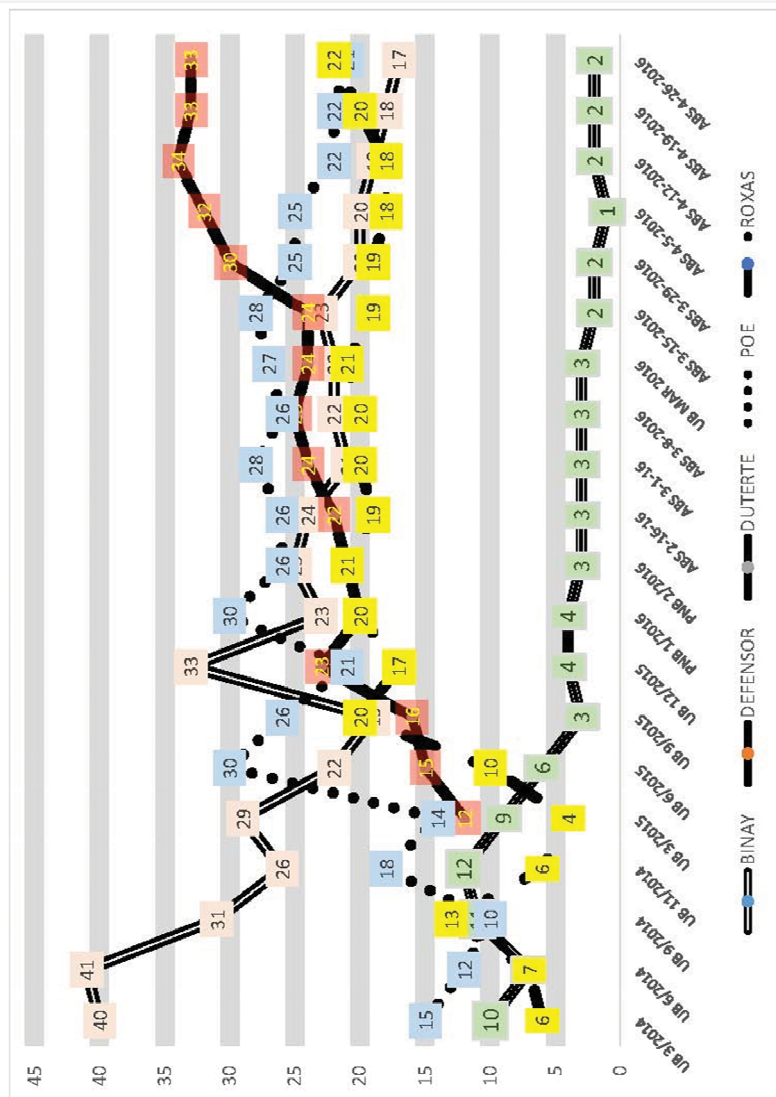
Figure 1 shows the floors (lowest) and ceilings (highest) of the pre-election preferences of all the candidates. Binay's "ceiling" was 41 per cent in June 2014, in a survey that did not yet include Duterte. Binay's floor was 17 per cent, registered in the last ABS-CBN survey conducted by Pulse Asia Inc. before the election. Poe, on the other hand, was polling at 30 per cent in two surveys held in June 2015 and January 2016, with her lowest pre-election support posted in September 2014. Roxas' ceiling was 22 per cent, recorded in the UB of March 2016 and again in the last ABS-CBN survey of late April 2016. Defensor-Santiago's pre-election preference was highest in UB November 2014, at 12 per cent, while her floor, 1 per cent, was recorded in the ABS-CBN survey of 5–10 April 2016. Finally, Duterte's floor was a double-digit 12 per cent in UB March 2015, despite his continued rejection of the suggestion/presure to run as president.

4 The key informant is a political strategist who has worked in various electoral campaigns in the Philippines, including the campaign team of a leading contender in the 2016 Philippine presidential elections.

5 In earlier pre-election surveys, the names of other probable contenders, drawn up by Pulse Asia's academic fellows, were included. Duterte's name was included only in the March 2015 *Ulat ng Bayan* survey, given his earlier public pronouncements that he would not vie for the presidency.



Figure 1. Presidential Pre-Election Polls, Pulse Asia Research Inc., March 2014–April 2016



His highest polling figure was 34 per cent, registered in the ABS-CBN survey of 12–17 April 2016. Election Day marked Duterte’s peak, and also the zenith of his rivals, specifically Binay and Poe, who had both reached their peak before or just at the beginning of the formal campaign period in early February 2016.

More than the floors and ceilings, the shifts in pre-election preferences indicated in the figures could be explained by the developments (such as a controversy or an issue) that affected voting support for each of the candidates and the effectiveness of the candidates in addressing the issue/s that confronted them or that mattered to the public.

## Dissecting Pre-Election Preferences across Geographic Areas/Socio-Demographic Groups

The Philippine voting population can be disaggregated by geographic area, age, socio-economic class and other socio-demographic attributes. For the first time in Philippine election history, the Commission on Elections disseminated the distribution of the registered voting population by area, age and gender. With regard to area, Figure 2 shows that more than half of the country’s registered voters reside in Luzon (National Capital Region to Region V), with the Visayas (Region VI to Region VIII) and Mindanao (Region IX to Caraga) each sharing more than one-fifth of total registered voters. Overseas Absentee Voters (OAVs) constituted less than 2.5 per cent of the total number of registered voters for the 2016 elections.

In terms of age, the Commission on Elections’ (COMELEC) data on registered voters indicates that almost half of the voters belong to a generation born proximate to or after the political transition in 1986, the 18–24 and 25–34 age groups (see Table 1).

The majority (51.5 per cent, or more than 28 million voters) of registered voters for the 2016 elections were women, with men constituting the remainder (with more than 26.3 million male registered voters), six per cent less than the female registered voters.

Figure 2. Registered Voters by Area: Number and as % of Total

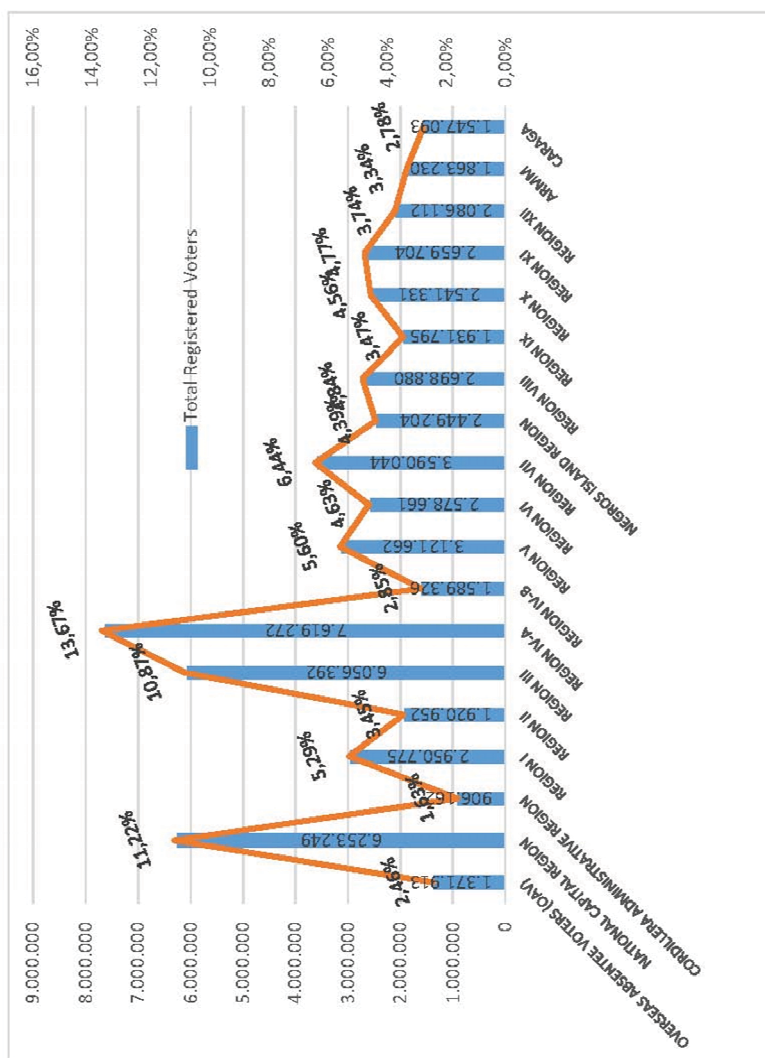


Table 1. Registered Voters by Age, Commission on Elections 2015

Age Group	Number	%
18–19	3,043,411	5.60
20–24	7,983,167	14.68
25–29	7,370,037	13.56
30–34	6,333,398	11.65
35–39	5,764,839	10.60
40–44	5,100,591	9.38
45–49	4,680,698	8.61
50–54	4,025,439	7.40
55–59	3,367,013	6.19
60–64	2,596,255	4.78
65–Above	4,098,996	7.54

Beyond the official statistics, voters are also disaggregated based on socio-economic classification and ethno-linguistic groups by social and market research organisations. In terms of socio-economic classification, a roster of criteria is used to distribute the population into five economic classifications – A, B, C, D and E. These criteria include characteristics of the neighbourhood, the durability of the house, home maintenance, home ownership, educational attainment, total household monthly income, occupation of the household head, household facilities, and the presence of household help. In the public opinion surveys of Pulse Asia Research Inc., the socio-economic classes are clustered into three main classifications: Class ABC, Class D, and Class E. Class D, the largest socio-economic classification, is further divided into Classes D1 and D2, with the ownership of their residential lot being the discriminant. Based on surveys conducted over the years, Class ABC constitutes approximately 5–10 per cent of the total Philippine population, class D around 65–75 per cent (with subclass D1 slightly higher than subclass D2), and class E around 20–30 per cent.

Finally, the primary language spoken at home enables survey research organisations to determine the ethno-linguistic distribution of the Philippine population. Based on the distribution of the respondents in Pulse Asia’s surveys from January to April 2016, the largest ethno-linguistic group is the Tagalogs, constituting close to 40 per cent of the respondents, followed by Cebuanos, comprising 21–23 per cent. The other major groups are Ilonggos (around 9 per cent), Ilocanos (around 7 per cent), Bicolanos (around 6 per cent), Kapampangans (around 4 per cent), Warays (around 4 per cent), and Pangasinenses (around 2 per cent). Other ethno-linguistic groups account for the remaining 7–8 per cent.

Among these geographic/socio-demographic variables, pre-election surveys show that candidates often generated considerably more support from areas that they came from or the ethnolinguistic group that they belonged to. During the campaign, all the candidates highlighted their geographic origin or their ethnolinguistic affiliation. Binay rooted himself in his parents' provinces, Batangas (in Region IV) and Isabela (in Region 2). Grace Poe traced her origins to her great grandfather's birthplace, Pangasinan (in Region 1). Mar Roxas (like Miriam Defensor-Santiago) was a former representative of Capiz (In Region 6) and is an Ilonggo (again, like Defensor-Santiago); Ilonggo is a language spoken in Region VI and in Negros Occidental in the Visayas region. Finally, Duterte, born in Cebu (a Cebuano), grew up and served as a public servant in Davao City in Mindanao. Table 2 shows the areas where specific candidates drew marginally or significantly higher<sup>6</sup> support across the pre-election surveys.

With respect to ethnolinguistic groups, Duterte, Roxas and Poe registered significantly higher support among the ethnolinguistic groups to which they belong. In the case of Duterte, his share of the Cebuano votes was consistently higher than his national-level preferences across all pre-election surveys, with 42 per cent, 43.9 per cent, 41 per cent and 62.7 per cent of the Cebuano votes in the January, February, March and April 2016 pre-election surveys, respectively. Roxas also recorded consistently higher voting support among his fellow Ilonggos, garnering 38.1 per cent, 39 per cent, 46.4 per cent and 33.7 per cent pre-election support across the four pre-election surveys of 2016. Finally, Poe's pre-election preference among the Tagalogs was marginally to slightly higher than her national preferences across the pre-election surveys.

In terms of socio-economic classes, the preferences of most candidates from each socio-economic class did not significantly diverge from their national pre-election preference, with the exception of Binay's significantly higher preference from Class E, recorded in the January *PB* (30.1 per cent against a national 23.3 per cent), the February *PB* (31 per cent versus the national 25.5 per cent) and the March *UB* (22.5 per cent versus the national 30.3 per cent).

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6 The margins of error for the sub-national areas included in the table are as follows: +/- 10.3 per cent for Region 1; +/- 12.2 per cent for Region 2; +/- 11 per cent for Region VII; +/- 11 per cent for Negros Island Group; +/- 10.6 for Northern Mindanao; +/- 10.6 for Davao region; +/- 11 per cent for Soccsksargen; and +/- 13.9 per cent for CARAGA.

Table 2. Geographic Areas with Significantly Higher Pre-election Preferences for Presidential Candidates, Various Pulse Asia Pre-election surveys (December 2015 to April 2016)

Candidate	Range of National Pre-election Preference (share in %, survey date)		Sub-national geographic area (region/province)	Range of Subnational Area Pre-election preference (share in %, survey date)	
	Low	High		Low	High
Binay	16.4 (April 2016)	32.6 (December 2015)	Cagayan Valley (Region II)	30.1 (March 2016)	67.2 (December 2015)
Duterte	19.7 (January 2016)	34.5 (April 2016)	Northern Mindanao (Region X)	29.7 (December 2015)	58.9 (April 2016)
			Davao Region (Region XI)	84.3 (January 2016)	92.5 (April 2016)
			Soccsksargen (Region XII)	28.1 (February 2016)	61.2 (April 2016)
			CARAGA (Region XIII)	26 (January 2016)	61.1 (March 2016)
Poe	21.1 (December 2015)	30.5 (January 2016)	Ilocos Region (Region I)	27.7 (April 2016)	56.2 (January 2016)
Roxas	17.1 (December 2016)	20.7 (March 2016)	Western Visayas (Region VI)	39 (April 2016)	52.6 (March 2016)
			Negros Island Region	24.4 (April 2016)	62.2 (March 2016)

Note: Surveys included in the table are the Pulse Asia Research Inc. *Ulat ng Bayan* of December 2015 and March 2016 and the *Pulso ng Bayan* of January, February, and April 2016.

Among the candidates, however, it was only Duterte who constantly had a marginally higher level of support from Class ABC, relative to his national voting support, in the pre-election surveys from January 2016 to April 2016.<sup>7</sup> Duterte's marginally higher pre-election preference in Class

7 Support for Duterte from Class ABC was 23.9, 23.6 per cent, 32.5 per cent and 43.5 per cent in the January, February, March and April 2016 surveys, respectively. These figures were 4.2 per cent, 2.2 per cent, 8.7 per cent and 9 per cent higher, respectively, than his national level support. The margins of error for

ABC may be explained by the class' greater concern for issues pertaining to personal safety.

There were no significant variances in voting support based on gender and age. Male voters showed only marginally higher preference for Duterte and female voters only registered marginally higher preference for Poe. Preferences among age groups tended to shift from one survey to another, although the leading contenders in the pre-election surveys – Duterte and Poe – had significantly higher shares among the younger age groups (18–24 and 25–34).

The patterns of voting support registered in pre-election surveys reaffirm the salience of geographic and ethno-linguistic variables identified in a previous study by Lande, who studied the 1992 elections (Lande 1996). Beyond securing support from their bailiwicks, the outcome of the 2016 presidential election was determined by the effectiveness of the response of select candidates to challenges and allegations against them and the traction that their campaign thrust or messages obtained.

## Candidate Strategies and Issues

### Binay: Hounded by Corruption Allegations

Among the candidates, Vice President “Jojo” Binay’s presidential run was strongly damaged by a corruption scandal that broke in August 2014. It was from this date that a subcommittee of the Senate’s Committee on the Accountability of Public Officials and Investigations (otherwise known as the Blue Ribbon Committee) started its investigation into the allegation that Binay, when he was mayor of the City of Makati, had personally benefited from an overpriced City Hall building. The subcommittee was comprised of known Binay opponents, including Senator Aquilino “Koko” Pimentel, Senator Alan Peter Cayetano, and Senator Antonio “Sonny” Trillanes IV. In the course of almost a year and a half, allegations of plunder and unexplained wealth were levelled against Binay in the Blue Ribbon sub-committee, with damaging testimonies from former Makati officials that included former allies of Binay, former Vice Mayor Ernesto Mercado and former councillors Renato Bondal and Narciso Enciso. The allegations included Binay’s ownership of a vast property in Batangas and the overpricing of public projects in Makati,

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Class ABC in these surveys were January 8.8 per cent, February 9.4 per cent, March 8.9 per cent and April 9 per cent.

from an education building to the free cakes given to senior citizens in Makati on their birthdays.

While Binay dismissed the charges as politically motivated, his rejection of a summoning from the sub-committee to appear and present counter-evidence, as well as his subsequent withdrawal from a one-on-one debate against Senator Trillanes IV, allowed the allegations to hound him during the campaign. Aside from this, the fate of Binay's son, Jejomar Erwin ("Junjun") Binay, who was suspended and eventually dismissed by the ombudsman as mayor of Makati, provided additional ammunition for the corruption allegations against Binay. The younger Binay was dismissed and perpetually barred from holding public office by the ombudsman in October 2015 for his role in the overpriced Makati City Hall building. Finally, the pending graft cases against Binay's wife, Elenita, who served as mayor of Makati from 1998 to 2001, also garnered much media attention. All told, the Binays were under siege during the campaign.

Immediately after the investigation started, Binay's support declined from 41 per cent in the June 2014 UB to 31 per cent in the September 2014 UB. While his pre-election preference stabilised from September 2014 (and even increased as a result of a controversy that affected Grace Poe in late 2015) until late March 2016, Binay's poor performance in the second debate resuscitated the public's attention to the serious allegations of corruption against the Vice President. Binay's demeanour during this debate, in which the issue of corruption was extensively discussed, may have been the cause of consistent decline in his voter support. Prevented by the organisers from presenting documents in his possession, Binay was visibly frustrated and irked in the course of the debate, rushing off the stage at the end of the debate while his adversaries shook hands and exchanged pleasantries.

Though Binay's responses to the corruption allegations were not direct or definitive, he did try to address the allegations through a communication's campaign that portrayed him as a typical victim of the elite. The highlight of this public relations effort was Binay's campaign team transforming the normally pejorative term, *nognog* (which is usually translated as "nigger") into a word that would win support for the vice president. In an advertisement that ran regularly on radio and television in the last quarter of 2015 onwards, Binay (who is dark-skinned) appropriated the label and claimed that "*nognog*" stood for a typical Filipino who is sun-drenched from tilling the land, forced to work abroad, teaching without a decent classroom, without money to buy food, or someone falsely accused of a crime. The advertisement ended with Binay's slogan



– “*ginhawa ay dama ng labat, kay Jojo Binay*” (comfort felt by all, with Jojo Binay).

However, this advertising campaign failed to win back sufficient support for Binay. For a public that has consistently told pollsters that corruption is an urgent national concern,<sup>8</sup> Binay’s claim that corruption allegations against him were politically motivated did not improve his image, which had suffered seemingly irreparable damage from corruption allegations and the accumulation of unexplained wealth during his long incumbency as mayor of the country’s premier commercial/business city.

## Poe Questionable Qualifications for the Presidency

Another leading contender in early polls, Grace Poe, also had to contend with equally serious allegations: questions about her citizenship. From June 2015 until early March 2016, Poe was dogged by three questions: whether she could be considered a natural-born citizen given that she was a foundling (orphan) whose parentage was uncertain; whether she had the 10- year continuous residency required of presidential candidate; and whether, by acquiring U.S. citizenship, she had lost her natural-born status, which is a requirement for the presidency (assuming of course she was considered a natural born citizen in the first place).

The first set of cases related to Poe’s citizenship issues were filed with COMELEC. In separate COMELEC decisions, and subsequent ratification by the COMELEC *en banc*, Poe’s certification of candidacy was cancelled by COMELEC. Immediately after receipt of the COMELEC’s decision, Poe filed a case with the Supreme Court to nullify such decisions. On 8 March 2016, the Supreme Court granted Poe’s petition, nullifying COMELEC’s earlier decision and declaring Poe qualified to run for the presidency.

The effect of such challenges to Poe’s candidacy is evidenced by the decline of her voting support between UB surveys of June 2015 and September and December 2015. In view of the incremental decline, Poe released an advertisement in mid-December 2015 that likened her situation to that of her late father, who also faced a disqualification case, also on the grounds of citizenship, when he vied for the presidency in 2004. At the end of the advertisement, which was played frequently on radio and television, the Supreme Court’s decision allowing her father to run was underscored. In the January 2016 UB, Poe’s voter support signifi-

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8 Fighting graft and corruption registers as one of the top urgent national concerns in the quarterly surveys of Pulse Asia Research Inc.

cantly increased to 30 per cent. Having dealt with the citizenship challenge, however, Poe's team neglected to direct their attention towards clearly articulating what a Poe presidency stood for, beyond the abstract *galing at puso* (competence and compassion/heart) slogan and the vague 20-point programme she articulated in her formal declaration for the presidency in mid-September 2015. Thus, while she and her team expected that a favourable decision of the Supreme Court on her citizenship case would sustain, if not increase her lead in the polls, the failure to clarify the proposed thrust of her administration, to differentiate her from the other contenders, led her voter support to stagnate at about 25 per cent of voters, a figure that dropped to one-fifth as many voters swung to Duterte starting at the end of March 2016.

## Roxas: Straight Line for the Straight Path Candidate

Figure 1 shows that the administration candidate, Mar Roxas, maintained basically the same level of support from September 2015 until the last survey of late April 2016. The only significant movement in Roxas's support was recorded from the June 2015 UB, when he had 10 per cent, to the September 2015 UB, when he registered 20 per cent. The September 2015 UB was conducted soon after Roxas was declared the official candidate of the Liberal Party.

Roxas' failure to expand his voting support could be attributed to his having campaigned with the thrust of continuity; more specifically, to sustain the commitment of the Aquino administration to follow the straight (non-corrupt) path (*daang matuwid*). While there is nothing inherently wrong with promising continuity, the Roxas campaign team failed to recognise early the limits of the *daang matuwid* vow. In promising to sustain the good governance efforts, Roxas essentially discarded one-quarter of the voting population,<sup>9</sup> which were of the opinion that the Aquino administration had failed to fulfil its commitment to *daang matuwid*. Moreover, Roxas failed to adequately address important issues that had dogged his presidential run in 2010; namely, questions of competence and his lack of connection with the average person.

Roxas was puzzled by questions about his competence. Among the candidates, Roxas was the only one to have experience in two branches of government. He was a member of the lower and upper house and

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<sup>9</sup> In surveys conducted by Pulse Asia, from September 2014 to December 2015, only one-third of the public agreed that the Aquino administration was fulfilling/fulfilled the vow to *trek daang matuwid*, with one-quarter being of the opinion that the Aquino administration had failed to fulfill this commitment.

even topped the senatorial race in 2010. Roxas also served as a member of the cabinet in three presidential administrations – Estrada, Arroyo and Aquino III. Despite such experience, Roxas has been criticised for his indecisiveness. In his first cabinet portfolio under Aquino III, as transportation secretary, Roxas was also criticised for failing to address the major problems of mass transportation that were blamed for the terrible traffic congestion in Metro Manila and other major cities. In his subsequent position as interior secretary, Roxas was also criticised for his handling of the relief mission in severely affected areas by Typhoon Yolanda.

Criticism of Roxas’ supposed lack of connection with the public is rooted in the fact that he comes from a very affluent family. Roxas’ campaign team tried to remedy this deficiency through an advertisement that aired in late January 2016, titled “*walang drama, trabaho lang* [no drama, all work].” In the advertisement, Roxas states:

They say I didn’t grow up poor. That I don’t have a dramatic story. But the elections aren’t about me. It’s about you and your family. I won’t give you drama. I’ll focus on creating jobs for you. That’s what I know. That’s what I’m good at.<sup>10</sup>

Based on the pre-election survey results, however, the advertisement did not improve Roxas’ standing, keeping the candidate espousing the straight path with straight line pre-election preferences.

## Defensor-Santiago: Saddled by Severe Illness

On her third try for the presidency, Miriam Defensor-Santiago was really a shadow of the candidate who almost won the position in 1992. Diagnosed with stage-four lung cancer in 2014, Defensor-Santiago nonetheless filed her certificate of candidacy in October 2015 as she launched the second volume of her best-selling book, *Stupid is Forever More*. In declaring her candidacy, Defensor-Santiago vowed that: “If I become president sometime in the very near future, this country will be much better than it was before. Today this country suffers from the malaise of plunder.”<sup>11</sup>

However, her physical condition prevented Defensor-Santiago from campaigning. She did not participate in the second televised presidential

10 See <<http://www.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2016/120382-mar-roxas-political-advertisement-no-drama>> (10 January 2017).

11 See <[www.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2016/109128-miriam-running-for-president-in-2016](http://www.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2016/109128-miriam-running-for-president-in-2016)> (10 January 2017).

debate and remained the only presidential contender with a constant single-digit pre-election preference.

## Duterte: From Local to National

Rodrigo Duterte was definitely the star of the 2016 election. His was a stand-out performer, not simply because he won, but because his run for the presidency broke new ground: he was the first president to come from Mindanao and to be elected from a local position, as mayor of the city of Davao. In addition, Duterte's presidential run was impressive as he slowly garnered voting support through what, based on key informant interviews, was a strategic campaign. Unlike other candidates, whose messages were quite abstract, Duterte repeatedly stressed one issue – criminality in general, and the pervasiveness of illegal drugs in particular. Survey data reveals the traction that such messaging had on voters. Presented with a roster of issues that a presidential candidate should address, Table 3 shows that, on aggregate, the fight against illegal drugs was deemed as the most important in the Pulse Asia PB surveys of January, February and April 2016.

Table 3. Pulse Asia *Pulso ng Bayan* surveys, January, February and April 2016 (Row in Per Cent)

National Concerns	Surveys		
	January 2016	February 2016	April 2016
Curbing the widespread sale and use of illegal drugs	36	39	41
Improving the pay of workers	38	39	34
Fighting graft and corruption in government	30	30	31
Reducing the poverty of many Filipinos	29	31	30
Controlling inflation	30	34	29
Creating more jobs	26	25	28
Fighting criminality	24	25	28
Enforcing the law on all whether influential or ordinary people	20	18	19
Increasing peace in the country	12	12	13

Note: Most urgent national concerns a presidential candidate should immediately address.

Base: Registered Voters with Biometrics.

Duterte's anti-crime message resonated because it was supported by his undisputed record of performance in addressing such a concern. Duterte also entered the race with all his possible "baggage" having already been revealed: his womanizing, his predilection towards swearing, and even a warning that if he becomes president, the public may regret it as he will not countenance any opposition.

To differentiate himself from the outgoing administration, Duterte's campaign carried the message that "change is coming." This abstract promise was complemented by the slogan *tapang at malasakit* (courage and compassion), a characterisation of Duterte that first came out in a video circulated in social media in late May 2015.<sup>12</sup> Later on, his campaign team used this characterisation in its other campaign paraphernalia, this time directly linking the traits with Duterte through a statement *Tapang at Malasakit si Duterte* (Duterte is courageous and compassionate). Fusing the first syllable of each trait, the shortened message becomes *Tama si Duterte* (Duterte is right).

Unlike other candidates, Duterte did not experience any significant decline in his pre-election voter support. The only marginal reduction was posted in January 2016, in the survey that followed his controversial cursing of Pope Francis (due to traffic caused by his visit to the Philippines the year before). Even when Duterte publicly rejected suggestions to run for the presidency, his pre-election preference was in the double digits, even higher or close to the voting support of other contenders such as Poe and Roxas. Duterte's decent pre-election voting support could be attributed to the roadshow he conducted on federalism from the middle of 2014 until the third quarter of 2015, and the media coverage he received given his colourful and straightforward responses to calls for him to run for president. Table 4 shows the voting support for Duterte across Pulse Asia's non-commissioned surveys.

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12 See <<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/694654/tapang-at-malasakit-dutertes-alleged-campaign-pitch-circulating-in-social-media>> (10 January 2017).

Table 4. Pre-Election Preference of Rodrigo Roa Duterte, Pulse Asia *Ulat Ng Bayan* and *Pulso Ng Bayan* Surveys, March 2015 to April 2016 (Row in Per Cent)

Area	March 2015	June 2015	Sept 2015	Dec 2015
Philippines	12	15	16	23
National Capital Region	7	11	21	27
Balance of Luzon	4	7	8	13
Visayas	9	13	14	18
Mindanao	34	37	29	43

Area	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	March 2016	April 2016
Philippines	20	21	24	34
National Capital Region	16	23	27	40
Balance of Luzon	8	10	15	22
Visayas	15	19	10	32
Mindanao	48	45	51	58

Across these surveys, Duterte's national voting support showed significant changes from September 2015 to December 2015 and from March 2016 to April 2016. The rise of voting support in the December 2015 UB can be attributed to Duterte's formal declaration in late November 2015 that he was running for president.

The second significant change in Duterte's preference was recorded in the April 2016 PB survey. This survey saw a 10 percentage point increase in Duterte's voting support, putting him ahead of the other presidential contenders. The increase could be attributed to Duterte's performance in the second presidential debate, held in Cebu. Separate probes in the April 2016 Pulse Asia PB survey found that a significant majority of the public (65 per cent) had heard, read or watched anything related to the second presidential debate held in Cebu. Of those who read/watched/ listened to the debate or news about the debate, an equally significant majority (81 per cent) were of the opinion that the debate would influence their votes. Finally, Table 5 shows that the plurality identified Duterte as the candidate who performed best in the debate.

Table 5. Pulse Asia *Pulso ng Bayan* 16-20 April 2016 Survey on the Second Presidential Debate (Row in Per Cent)

Candidate	Location					Socio-economic class		
	RP	NCR	BL	VIS	MIN	ABC	D	E
Duterte, Rodrigo	34	37	26	23	58	46	32	39
Poe, Grace	28	23	32	29	21	22	29	24
Roxas, Mar	16	8	17	27	8	17	16	12
Binay, Jojo	11	10	13	14	3	6	11	10
Defensor-Santiago, Miriam	3	6	2	2	2	6	3	1
I don't have enough knowledge to give an opinion	6	8	7	5	3	2	6	9
Don't know/Refused/ None	3	6	3	0	4	1	3	4

Note: Question: In your opinion, among the presidential candidates, who do you think did well in the debate?  
Base: Aware of the presidential debate, 65% of total respondents.

## A Media-Driven Campaign

Most of the presidential candidates “barnstormed” extensively, with campaign rallies held all around the country, prior to and during the formal campaign period. Despite this, the 2016 presidential elections remained primarily media-driven. It is through media that candidates are able to broadcast their campaign promises, chiefly through advertisements. The media also reported developments related to each candidate and their campaign sorties. As mentioned earlier, two out of three Filipinos listened to, watched or read about the second presidential debate, although the actual proportion of those who viewed/listened to the debate as it was broadcast may actually be lower.<sup>13</sup> The larger segment of the public may have read, watched or listened to news reports that recounted what transpired during the debates.

13 A ratings agency reported that viewership of the second debate was at 11.5 per cent in Mega Manila. See <[www.lionhearttv.net/2016/03/agb-nielsen-mega-manila-tv-ratings-march-18-march-20-2016-lip-sync-battle-philippines-remains-the-most-watched-saturday-program-tv5s-pilipi/](http://www.lionhearttv.net/2016/03/agb-nielsen-mega-manila-tv-ratings-march-18-march-20-2016-lip-sync-battle-philippines-remains-the-most-watched-saturday-program-tv5s-pilipi/)> (10 January 2017).

The Filipino public is generally attentive to news. Asked about the frequency of watching/listening/reading news through various media, a majority indicate that they watch the news everyday on television. Table 6 shows the results of Pulse Asia surveys on this probe.

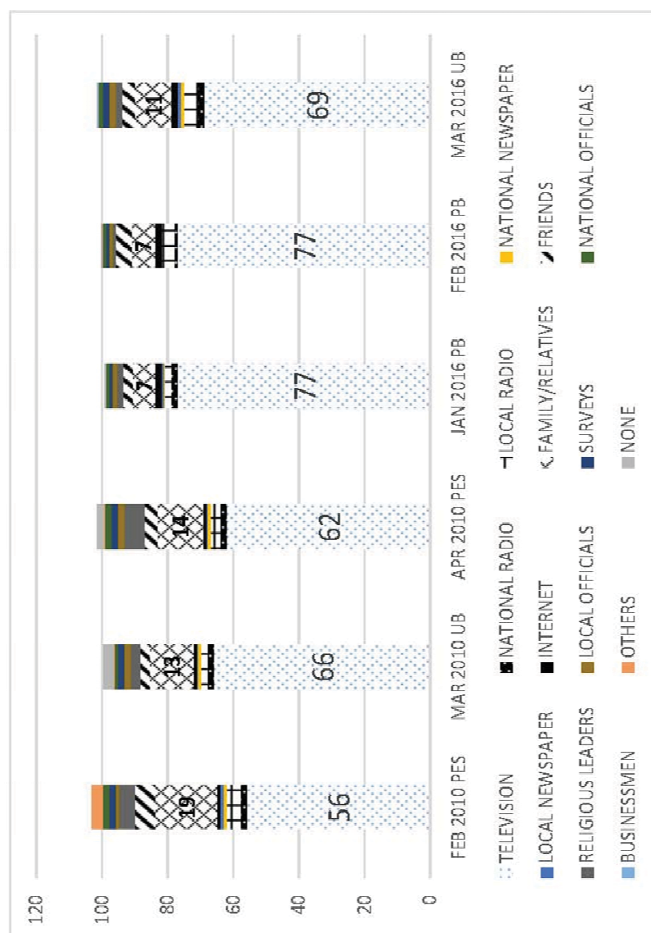
**Table 6. News Tracking. Frequency of accessing news through media.**  
Pulse Asia Research Surveys, January to March 2016, Philippines (Row Per Cent)

Medium	Survey dates	Every Day	4-6 times a week	2-3 times a week	Once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month	Seldom than once a month	Never
Television	March 2016	56	16	16	5	2	3	2	0.2
	Feb 2016	61	17	14	4	2	1	1	1
	Jan 2016	57	18	16	4	2	1	2	0
Radio	March 2016	17	8	13	11	6	7	26	13
	Feb 2016	13	10	15	9	5	6	26	17
	Jan 2016	14	10	17	10	5	6	23	15
Newspaper	March 2016	3	2	4	6	3	6	48	28
	Feb 2016	2	1	4	5	4	6	41	36
	Jan 2016	3	2	4	6	3	7	66	8
Internet	March 2016	5	4	5	3	1	2	16	64
	Feb 2016	6	3	4	3	2	2	12	42
	Jan 2016	5	3	4	2	2	3	11	71

As shown in Figure 3, media is identified by a significant majority of the public as the most influential source of information in choosing a president. Television remains the primary source.



Figure 3. Most Influential Source of Information in Choosing a President, Pulse Asia Surveys, February 2010 to March 2016, Philippines (as a Percentage)



## Conclusion

The results of the 2016 presidential elections are uncontested. Rodrigo Duterte won the presidency by a convincing margin, the outcome of a clear and focused campaign focused on a single issue – fighting criminality – backed by a record of prior performance in addressing this con-

cern as Davao mayor. Based on the Commission on Elections report, the voter turnout in the 2016 elections was over 80 per cent, which is higher than prior electoral contests. While the results of several other races were questioned, from several local seats to the senatorial and vice presidential elections, a large segment of the public are of the opinion that the results of the races are believable.<sup>14</sup>

The 2016 presidential elections had many of the same characteristics as previous ones. Personalities dominated. Various strategies were used to shore up the candidate's positive characteristics and to deflect the negatives that may lead to the loss of voter support. While there were three presidential debates in which candidates presented their stance on issues, the variance in their positions was negligible. Candidates spent enormous sums in running their advertisements running and in mobilising brokers and networks of supporters. But the meat of their programmes, and virtually all candidates had a platform of action, was not covered in their campaign sorties or in their media appearances. Voter preference changed as a result of media reported events and the effective handling of challenges facing the contenders.

Given the continuing nature of Philippine elections, borrowing and reiterating Anderson's word – domesticating – what is unclear is whether the winner in the elections could deliver the change that is promised, especially at a time when citizens, in a post-election situation, are again demobilised.

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14 Based on the July 2016 *Ulat ng Bayan* survey, 90 per cent of Filipinos regard the results of races in their area as believable, while 67 per cent believe that the results of the vice presidential contest are believable.